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INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0157
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9844
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6786
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 4849
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3484
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0552
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3576
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2653
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7351
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5085
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1753
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION PRIORITY

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/29/2017

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: NAVY CLAIMS IT AVERTS TAMIL TIGER
ATTACK ON COLOMBO PORT

Classified By: DCM James R. Moore, for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (S) Summary: Government of Sri Lanka military sources described to DATT on January 27 an attempted Tamil Tiger (LTTE) attack on the Colombo Port that morning in which the Navy destroyed three suspected "Sea Tiger" vessels, two of them suicide boats, disguised as fishing craft. Local weekend press gave prominent, straightforward coverage to the incident and a Navy spokesman's official account of it. However, a police source (strictly protect) told RSO that three men in custody from one of the alleged Tiger boats appeared to be ordinary fishermen from Negombo. The scenario of the LTTE trying to pull off an attack against a significant economic target in the South is, in fact, highly likely. While the consensus is that this was a foiled LTTE attack, the information provided by the police casts some doubt on the Sri Lankan military's version of events. End summary.

12. (C) Government of Sri Lanka military sources described to DATT January 27 an attempted Tamil Tiger (LTTE) attack on the Colombo Port that morning in which the Navy destroyed three suspected "Sea Tiger" vessels, two of them suicide boats, disguised as fishing craft. The source claimed three 8-meter LTTE boats approached the Colombo Port High Security Zone (HSZ) at approximately 5:30 AM on January 27. According to the official version, when the boats failed to stop on order, the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) fired. The alleged Sea Tiger boats reportedly returned fire. The Navy said it later destroyed two boats six and eleven nautical miles, respectively, from the port, after a maritime chase. A third boat, the Navy said, took cover behind a Green Line commercial ship, the "Pride of Peloponnesia," causing damage to the ship as it exploded - either because of SLN fire or by intentionally blowing itself up, according to DATT's source. The SLN rescued three suspected LTTE cadres from the water and turned them over to the police.

13. (S) A police source (strictly protect) told RSO on January

27 at approximately 8:30 AM that the three men in custody from one of the alleged Tiger boats appeared to be ordinary fishermen from Negombo, a suburb of Colombo -- implying that at least one of the boats the SLN had attacked was indeed a fishing vessel. Requesting strict confidentiality, the police indicated that they had instructions to hold the three fishermen in order to ensure their silence about the incident. Source reconfirmed this information to RSO on the evening of January 29.

14. (S) COMMENT: It is not surprising that that the LTTE would attempt a major attack on a southern target following recent military defeats in the East. This may well be what, in fact, happened. However, aside from the question about the three rescued fishermen, there are some parts of the official version that do not immediately add up. It is not clear why the military would simply turn over captured LTTE cadres to the police without interrogating them at length, as is the usual practice. Second, it is counterintuitive that a small suicide vessel blowing up in close proximity to a large merchant ship would cause damage only to cargo containers on board, whose doors were blown open, without damaging the hull of the ship (as official sources report). That type of damage would seem more consistent with an exploding artillery shell. Embassy will continue to seek clarification of the incident. It is too soon to conclude definitively that all three craft involved were LTTE boats or that one or more of the alleged boats were legitimate fishing vessels.

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